

2012 Annual Report to the Board of Forestry

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Habitat**



March 2013

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I. OVERVIEW

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Division of Habitat (Habitat), submits our 2012 annual report to the Board of Forestry as required by AS 41.17.047(d). This report summarizes the activities of Habitat during the period January 1 – December 31, 2012, to implement the Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA). This report also informs the Board of Forestry about the effectiveness of the FRPA, its regulations, and best management practices (BMPs) designed to protect the resources for which Habitat has statutory responsibility.

Alaska Statutes require ADF&G to manage, protect, maintain, improve, and extend the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state in the interest of the economy and general well-being of the State (AS 16.05.020), to ensure the proper protection of anadromous fish habitat (AS 16.05.871), and to provide fish passage (AS 16.05.841). Under FRPA, ADF&G is given due deference on private and public land regarding effects on fish habitat from timber operations including variations to riparian standards, designation of alternative site-specific riparian protection plans, and road location decisions within riparian areas (AS 41.17.098(d)). ADF&G is granted due deference for measures allowing the maintenance of important fish and wildlife habitats on state and municipal lands (AS 41.17.060(c) (7)). Also under FRPA, ADF&G helps identify and protect important wildlife habitats on private lands, and provides educational, technical, and extension services for voluntary management techniques that minimize adverse effects on wildlife habitat (AS 41.17.098(d) and AS 41.17.910(b)(c)).

Funding for ADF&G implementation of FRPA during calendar year 2012 came completely from generals funds.

A strong ADF&G field presence helped to ensure the proper protection of anadromous fish habitat and to provide for free fish passage. Habitat biologists were able to work closely with land managers and industry on the ground to identify optimal stream crossing locations, alternative access routes, and road locations.

II. PRIVATE, MUNICIPAL, AND TRUST LAND ACTIVITY

Project staff reviewed all detailed plans of operations (DPO), changes in operations, and renewal notices provided by the Division of Forestry (DOF) for compliance with FRPA and its implementing regulations. We assessed road alignments, drainage structures, the width and integrity of riparian buffers, and erosion control BMPs, particularly with respect to our statutory obligations under AS 41 and AS 16. We assisted contractors for municipal and trust land activities with background and technical information for winter ice and snow crossings of fish-bearing waters. We provided recommendations to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat, pursuant to AS 41.17.910. We reviewed requests for variations from the FRPA. We issued Fish Habitat Permits that, when fully implemented by permittees, properly protected anadromous fish habitat and provided efficient fish passage. During review or inspection of forestry-related activities, we

identified and nominated freshwater anadromous fish habitat to the *Catalog of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes* (Catalog), and documented high value resident fish habitat. We accounted for Fish Habitat Permit applications reviewed and denied and for Fish Habitat Permit violations where enforcement action was necessary. We spent the time necessary in the field to support the forestry-related activities listed above on private, municipal, University of Alaska, and Mental Health Trust lands.

SOUTHEAST REGION

Craig Area Office staff reviewed and commented on 8 DPOs, reviewed 1 request for variation ~~and~~ 5 changes in operation requests, processed 1 renewal, and conducted 22 FRPA inspections.

Craig staff also continued to work with DOF, NRCS, and Klukwan on Long Island looking at 2 potential culvert replacements that resulted from a road condition survey conducted in 2009.

SOUTHCENTRAL REGION

Anchorage Regional Office staff reviewed and commented on 5 DPOs, 4 requests for variation, and 2 changes in operation requests. Anchorage staff also conducted 12 FRPA inspections and 7 Fish Habitat Permit compliance inspections.

Anchorage staff issued 7 AS 16.05.841 Fish Habitat Permits, submitted 9 updates to the Catalog, and documented 67 anadromous fish water bodies.

Kenai Peninsula staff reviewed and commented on 4 DPO's, and reviewed and commented on 1 change in operation. Kenai Peninsula staff also conducted 12 FRPA inspections, issued 2 Fish Habitat Permits and conducted 2 compliance inspections. In addition, Kenai Peninsula staff submitted 6 updates to the Catalog on private or municipal lands.

INTERIOR REGION

Fairbanks Regional Office staff reviewed and commented on 1 DPO on private lands in the Tok area and 3 on Fairbanks North Star Borough lands. No FRPA-related Fish Habitat permits were issued on private, municipal, or trust lands in 2012.

III. STATE LAND ACTIVITY

Project staff reviewed and commented on Forest Land Use Plans (FLUP) and Five-Year Schedules of Timber Sales (FYSTS) we received from the DOF. We also completed the work on State lands described in the first paragraph of section II, above.

SOUTHEAST REGION

Craig Area Office staff conducted 2 inspections on state related FRPA operations, and reviewed and commented on one DPO for activities proposed on state-managed lands.

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SOUTHCENTRAL REGION

Kenai Peninsula staff conducted 3 FRPA inspections on state-managed lands.

INTERIOR REGION

Fairbanks Regional Office staff reviewed and commented on 5 firewood sales in the Fairbanks Area, 1 salvage FLUP in the Valdez/Copper Area, and 4 FLUPs in the Delta Area. Five Fish Habitat permits were issued for winter ice bridge stream crossings by timber access roads. Staff also reviewed and commented on 5 Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales, for the Fairbanks, Delta, and Tok areas. In addition, staff have been reviewing and commenting on various plans for blow-down timber salvage and biomass harvest, including the Tok 25-year Biomass Harvest Preliminary Best Interest Finding.

IV. FEDERAL LAND ACTIVITY

Project staff reviewed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [documents](#) for compliance with the FRPA and its regulations. We assessed conditions as described above in the first paragraph of section II. We issued the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) concurrences that verified the proper protection of anadromous fish habitat and maintenance of anadromous and resident fish passage during timber-related activities. We continued to collaborate with the USFS to protect fish and wildlife resources and their habitats on federal lands, particularly on the Tongass National Forest. We field checked our work on federal lands whenever possible.

SOUTHEAST REGION

Craig Area Office staff reviewed and commented on three NEPA documents and issued 67 USFS Concurrences.

The high number of concurrences issued in the Southeast Region was due, in part, to significant road maintenance, closeout, and storage efforts on the Tongass National Forest-- a trend we expect to continue next year.

SOUTHCENTRAL REGION

Anchorage Regional Office, Palmer Area Office, and Kenai Peninsula Area Office reported no activity on federal lands during this reporting period.

INTERIOR REGION

Fairbanks Regional Office staff provided comments on the Tonsina Bluff II timber sale on federal lands off the Edgerton Highway. Staff continued coordination with contractors from various Interior villages regarding upcoming proposals for biomass harvests from federal trust and Native corporation lands.

V. FOREST PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION OVER ALL LANDS

MONITORING

Project staff continued to participate with DOF in forest practices compliance and effectiveness monitoring efforts.

The DOF monitoring strategy for FRPA BMPs includes documentation of compliance during field inspections conducted by foresters. Habitat Division staff participated in compliance monitoring field inspections.

Habitat Division also participated in federal effectiveness monitoring meetings and field trips.

VI. SPECIAL PROJECTS

TLMP IMPLEMENTATION

Habitat staff met with USFS and DOF staff to continue development the Wrangell Island timber sale. Habitat also provided scoping comments for the Saddle Lakes timber sale that informed the USFS of our needs for reviewing the DEIS for that project and commented on the Tonka, and Big Thorne timber sale DEIS's this year.

ANADROMOUS WATERS CATALOGING

Douglas area staff continued to catalog anadromous fish streams in Haines, Sitka, and Skagway during 2012 and are preparing to catalog anadromous fish streams in Petersburg and Wrangell in 2013. This project, funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Funds, will correct existing inaccuracies within the Catalog and document uncataloged streams for inclusion in the Catalog.

Beginning in 2012, Anchorage Area Habitat Biologist Will Frost began working to catalog waters on Kodiak and Afognak islands to document the presence/absence of anadromous fish and, where appropriate, submit official nominations for inclusion in the *Catalog of Waters Important for the Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes* and its companion Atlas. This three-year project, funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Funds, will correct existing inaccuracies within the Catalog and document non-cataloged streams for inclusion in the Catalog.

TONGASS FISH PASSAGE PRIORITIZATION

Since 1998, the USFS and ADF&G have worked closely to evaluate fish passage problems across the Tongass National Forest. Project staff continue to work with the USFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other agencies to prioritize fish passage restoration projects.

ROAD CONDITION SURVEYS

Kenai area staff are working with DNR State Forestry to survey crossing structures on forestry roads requiring fish passage and review compliance with FRPA on all State and private lands on the Kenai Peninsula. This was the second year of a three-year project funded in part by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund.

Anchorage area staff worked with DNR State Forestry to survey crossing structures and road conditions on private lands in the Tyonek area.

VII. ADMINISTRATION, BUDGET, AND STAFFING

ADF&G received an \$85,000 one-time increment in our General Funds in Fiscal Year 2013 to help cover the costs of conducting FRPA related work. Habitat is requesting \$85,000 in General Funds as a permanent increment in our budget.

STAFF CHANGES

PROMOTIONS

Patti Berkahn	Habitat Bio II to III	HAB – Kenai Peninsula
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RETIREMENTS

Susan Chihuly	F&G Program Tech	HAB – Kenai Peninsula
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RESIGNATIONS

Stormy Haught	Habitat Bio III	HAB – Anchorage
Joe Hitselberger	Habitat Bio III	HAB -- Juneau

NEW HIRES

Laurie Holt	F&G Program Tech	HAB – Kenai Peninsula
Brian Blossom	Habitat Bio I	HAB – Kenai Peninsula
Stormy Haught	Habitat Bio III	HAB – Palmer
Samantha Lannet	Admin Asst III	HAB -- Juneau

VIII.STATEMENT OF FRPA EFFECTIVENESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES TO CORRECT PROCEDURAL OR SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEMS

The ADF&G considers the FRPA an effective mechanism for maintaining fish habitat, including water quality, during forestry-related activities. In addition to properly protecting fish habitat under AS 16.05.871, Habitat ensures fish passage under AS 16.05.841.

IX. RESEARCH AND MONITORING NEEDS

The Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (TLMP) includes Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines. Habitat Division is qualitatively assessing the applicability of these standards and guidelines during project planning and implementation, as well as participating in annual effectiveness monitoring in the field with USFS staff. Habitat Division will continue to work with other ADF&G divisions about the applicability and utility of the standards and guidelines, and plans to participate in the five-year review of the TLMP in 2013.

X. CALENDAR YEAR 2013

In addition to our ongoing FRPA responsibilities detailed elsewhere in this report, Habitat Division will work on the following tasks during calendar year 2013, as funding and staffing allow:

- Habitat will participate in road condition surveys on forest roads transiting state and private lands on the Kenai Peninsula funded through the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (SSF) program.
- Increase our field presence during late winter/early spring to monitor winter road construction, use, and closeout in relation to fish habitat and water quality.

- Continue to provide training describing the department's Fish Habitat Permit Program under the Anadromous Fish Act (AS 16.05.871) and the Fishway Act (AS 16.05.841) to resource agency staff, timber operators, land and resource management planners, and landowners. This training will include strategies to prevent, resolve, and minimize impacts to fish habitat, including fish passage.
- Participate in a series of DOF-sponsored training sessions for agency staff and operators.
- Participate in Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan implementation and other initiatives.
- Habitat will continue to work with other ADF&G divisions and with DOF on FLUPs, best interest findings, and other documents related to the recent and foreseeable increases in acreage and volumes proposed for fuelwood harvest, biomass harvest, and salvage harvest in the Interior and Northern regions as funding allows. These increases have the potential for landscape level effects and opportunities regarding fish and wildlife habitat, and for access to and harvest of associated species.

Distribution by email:

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